

***Thunderbird Conservation Park
Master Plan
Executive Summary
June 2006***

Background

In 1956, the City of Glendale entered into a sale/lease agreement with the Bureau of Land Management to obtain 1,062 acres of the Hedgpeth Hills that would eventually become known as Thunderbird Conservation Park (TCP). In a later land exchange with the City of Phoenix, Glendale acquired an additional 66 acres to add to TCP north of Pinnacle Peak Road. Land use restriction changes enacted by the Glendale City Council also added an additional 57 acres. The current area encompassed by TCP is 1,185 acres.

In 1967, the City of Glendale adopted the Master Development Plan for Thunderbird Semi-Regional Park. This master plan emphasized development of passive recreation, such as picnicking, hiking, and horseback riding with some limited areas of development, such as an amphitheater and golf course. At the time, the development activities were seen as being compatible with the pristine, unspoiled desert and open space that characterizes the park.

The Glendale Parks Master Plan 1985-1995 placed TCP in the conservation category. This updated plan maintained that conservation parks should include natural areas, varying topography, water features, picnic areas, hiking and riding trails, scenic drives, and other facilities not requiring intensive development.

The 2002 Parks and Recreation Department Master Plan continued to place TCP in the conservation category. Based on the continued designation as a conservation park, in 2004 the city of Glendale and the community began developing a new master plan for the park. Key areas addressed in the plan include park use, standards for maintenance, and park management practices. The process was highlighted by the gathering of wide-ranging public input in meetings, surveys of both the community and park users, and studies and analysis of the park site.

In September 2005, a draft of the preliminary master plan was presented to the community. At that time, public feedback indicated the need to reconsider the recommendations for the plan. Since then, additional steps were taken to listen to the public and collect additional park information. As a result, the recommendations for changes to the plan are based on the following priorities:

- Limit park improvements
- Repair/replace restrooms
- Provide safe drinking water
- Provide a safe and clean park
- Improve signage for parking, rules and regulations; trail markers, and plant and wildlife identification
- Provide shade and picnic areas
- Provide areas for interpretive education discussions
- Provide parking but limit expansion
- Enhance and preserve wildlife
- Maintain existing trails
- Connect trails
- Restore areas with native vegetation, as well as preserve native vegetation already in the park

Master Plan Public Process

Listed below are the steps taken in development of the Thunderbird Conservation Park Master Plan:

- As part of an open space and trails planning process, a community-wide needs assessment was distributed to 2,000 random Glendale households in the winter of 2003-04 with 403 responses. Part of the assessment included questions regarding Thunderbird Conservation Park. The questions addressed the public's interest in park elements and needs for use of the park.
- The first public meeting was held in January 2004.
- A focus group meeting was held in April 2004 with representation by equestrians, hikers, bicyclists, clubs and organizations.
- A second public meeting was held in April 2004.
- During the meetings, requests of the community were to protect the park, conserve its resources, and plan for its use.
- Based on information collected from the public meetings, survey and studies, three alternative preliminary plans were developed and presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission and published on the city web site for public comment.
- Five resource analysis studies of the park area were completed by the Logan Simpson Design Group. Those studies included: Cultural, Biological, Visual, Land Use, and Soil/Slope/Geological assets.
- Based on concerns regarding park drainage, Logan Simpson Design Group also completed a watershed analysis for the park.
- The draft of the preliminary master plan was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission in June 2004. At that time and since then, the public has provided a strong message to take steps to conserve, enhance, and protect this environmentally sensitive land.
- The Thunderbird Conservation Park Master Plan was postponed until the 59th Avenue Road design public process was completed. That street public process and design approval was completed earlier this year.
- Once the road project design was approved, the City determined that more public input was needed for the park master plan project.
- Another focus group meeting with park users and interested organizations was conducted on September 6, 2005.
- The draft preliminary plan was again presented and discussed with the Parks and Recreation Commission on September 12, 2005. The plan and process updates have been reviewed with the Parks and Recreation Commission at its monthly meetings since September 2005.
- Two public meetings were held on September 14 and 17, 2005, to present the draft preliminary master plan and solicit feedback. At that time, public feedback indicated the need to reconsider the recommendations for the plan.
- The Thunderbird Conservation Park web page continued to include the plans, reports, surveys, updates and opportunities for the public to provide comment.
- Staff conducted an on-site user questionnaire at Thunderbird Conservation Park on various days of the week and times of the day in September and October 2005. A total of 751 park users responded to the questionnaire.
- On November 15, 2005, city staff and the consultant presented an overview of the draft preliminary master plan to the City of Glendale Commission on Persons with Disabilities. Park accessibility and proposed amenities were discussed.
- At the December 12, 2005, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, Commission members reviewed the summary of 2005 public meetings, comments from the Commission on Individuals with Disabilities, results of 751 on-site user questionnaires, the most frequently asked questions compiled from collected public comment, and observations from the Commission tours of the City of Phoenix North Mountain Preserve and visitor center, and Thunderbird Conservation Park.

- At the January 9, 2006, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting staff provided an update on the collection and evaluation of public input to date, as well as comments provided at public meetings and through responses to the website's "Frequently Asked Questions." Public comments were also heard at this meeting.
- In January 2006, the Glendale Park Rangers and Park Maintenance staff provided additional comments and ideas regarding the park master plan. Also, ranger and park staff conducted periodic observations of parking lot uses from November 24 (Thanksgiving Day) through December 31, 2005.
- In January 2006, staff video-taped Thunderbird Conservation Park, City of Scottsdale Pinnacle Peak Park and City of Phoenix North Mountain Preserve to identify and provide visual comparison opportunities for park features, such as trails, signage, parking designs, shade structures, picnic areas, restroom, visitor and park office facilities. This video was presented at the March 2006 Park and Recreation Commission meeting.
- Staff photographed park elements of other area mountain parks for purposes of presenting examples of designs and materials utilized for signage, shade structures, seating, vegetation, facilities and parking. The photos were incorporated into presentations provided to the Parks and Recreation Commission and at the April 2006 public meetings.
- Police, Parks, Recreation and Ranger staff and several residents met on-site to discuss the 59th Avenue culvert. Parks and Recreation staff also contacted other area organizations that utilize culverts for trail connection to discuss design and operational impacts.
- Staff toured the park with an Arizona Game and Fish representative to discuss the wildlife and vegetation in the park.
- Park and Recreation Commission member representatives and staff met with various school representatives to discuss input on the proposed park designs and how schools may utilize the park.
- City staff met with Arrowhead Lakes Homeowners Association and Arrowhead Amenities representatives, residents and the Arizona Game and Fish representative at the park's sedimentation area to share information about the sedimentation basin and tour the site on April 1, 2006.
- A study of sediment in the lake was completed in April 2006.
- Parks and Recreation staff met on-site with an American Conservation Experience (ACE) trail maintenance representative to review the trail system and identify designated and undesignated trails.
- Parks and Recreation staff reviewed proposed conceptual changes to the Thunderbird Conservation Master Plan at the April 10, 2006 Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting.
- Two public meetings were conducted to present and review the proposed changes to the master plan. The meetings were held on April 26 and 29, 2006 at Deer Valley High School. A total of 43 citizens attended the meetings.
- Parks and Recreation staff presented the proposed master plan changes and comments from the public meetings to the Parks and Recreation Commission on May 10, 2006.

Master Plan Recommendations

The revised plan's recommendations reflect the additional feedback and information collected through the public input process, park users and park analysis. The revisions to the plan were based on utilizing existing park conditions as the benchmark for the changes and to insure that the plan reflects maximizing the park elements that already are located in the park.

First, the plan's recommendations include overall priorities for the park which are listed below:

Overall Priorities for the Entire Park

1. Provide consistent maintenance and design standards for park trails, trailheads, trail nodes, signage, trash cans, ramadas, picnic tables, drinking fountains, equestrian hitching posts and troughs, restrooms, parking, facilities and lighting.
2. Establish surfacing and marking standards for parking lots and roads (paved and unpaved).
3. Insure the park property boundaries are clearly identified to prevent encroachment onto park property.
4. Provide mileage indicators and clearly mark all designated trails.
5. Establish and annually update an operations plan to manage and maintain the park.
6. Develop a community education outreach program regarding park wildlife, vegetation, geology and other natural areas in the park.

Second, the proposed plan is divided into four major areas of the park. The four attached maps correspond to the numbered recommendations listed under each park area described below:

- 55th Avenue and Pinnacle Peak Area
- Sedimentation Basin Area
- 59th Avenue Wildlife Habitat and Amphitheater Area
- 67th Avenue Equestrian Trail Area

55th Avenue and Pinnacle Peak Road Area

1. Establish a trail node at the traffic signal at Pinnacle Peak Road and 55th Avenue signalized street crossing including a new trail entrance node into the park
 - More pedestrian-friendly and designated crossing to the park at 55th Avenue/Pinnacle Peak Road
2. Establish a pedestrian entrance located at 55th Avenue and Pinnacle Peak Road
 - More pedestrian-friendly and designated crossing to the park at 55th Avenue/Pinnacle Peak Road
3. Keep the existing parking lot with 68 unpaved parking spaces and provide option for limited expansion of parking along Pinnacle Peak Road
 - Improve surfacing for dust control
 - Limit park improvements of existing parking lot – additional 34 spaces, include designated handicap parking
 - Provide option for future limited expansion of up to 100 parking spaces. This identifies future parking as needed and insures parking remains adjacent to the road, and not encroaching further into the park
4. Establish a new bus parking area off of new parking lot
 - Provide parking for school bus parking, to deter utilizing car parking spaces
5. Upgrade designated trailhead entrance at west end of parking lot for H-2 and H-1 Trails
 - Improve park information and trail use signage
6. Add a new non-enclosed, shaded seating area for interpretive discussions – seating 60-100 people
 - Provide areas for interpretative education discussion for area schools and other groups
 - Provide accessible shade and seating that meet ADA (American Disabilities Act) standards

7. Add three single-use (up to two picnic tables) ramadas located south of the existing parking lot with option for two additional single-use ramadas
 - Provide areas shade and resting, designated area for meeting other park users
8. Add restroom with drinking fountains
 - Provide support elements to park users that currently do not exist; park users and schools indicated need for access to water and restrooms
9. Add 53rd and Pinnacle Peak Road secondary entrance
 - Creates a loop for emergency vehicles to enter and exit the parking lot
10. Add a new handicap accessible trail with two access points at east and west ends of the existing parking lot
 - Provides trail access to individuals who may be disabled
11. Add trail node entrance to accessible trail on southeast end of the parking lot
 - Provides point of entrance to ramada and restroom area
12. Add trail node entrance to accessible trail on east end of parking lot
 - Provides direct access to the interpretive/accessible trail
13. Modify and upgrade existing trail to meet ADA standards and provide interpretive signage along the trail
 - Provide accessible trail for disabled or others who do not wish to hike the more strenuous trails
 - Provides education experience along the trail that identifies park vegetation, geology and wildlife
14. Add a pedestrian trail node at 51st Avenue and Pinnacle Peak Road on northeast side of the park
 - Designates a current undesignated trail and provide pedestrian access to this area of the park
15. Consider optional resting benches located along the interpretive/accessible trail
 - Provides locations along the trail for users to rest
16. Add informational signage at the top of the H-2 Trail with an option for 2-4 resting benches
 - Identifies various foothill and mountain peaks in the area
 - Provides educational opportunity to learn more about the area
 - Provides designated resting areas at the top of the trail
17. Add optional new trail node and designating an undesignated trail that leads to a view point located on the eastside of the park
 - Designates a currently undesignated trail and provides a scenic view of the valley and golf course area.
18. Restore native vegetation
 - Restore vegetation in areas affected by the 2005 fire and identify areas to remove invasive vegetation

Sedimentation Basin Area

1. Keep existing paved parking (four spaces) and viewing blind area west of the lake
2. Provide for interpretative signage along the trail and at the viewing blinds located north of the sedimentation lake
 - Provide educational opportunities about the lake, vegetation and wildlife in this area
3. Improve existing H-1 Trail that leads from 51st Ave to the 55th Ave and Pinnacle parking lot and 59th Avenue parking lot
 - Upgrade the existing trail to meet state and national trail standards that staff is also utilizing for other trails in the park
4. Address vegetation restoration in the sedimentation lake area
 - Identify and remove invasive vegetation and restore native vegetation that also accommodates wildlife
5. Provide two water guzzlers for wildlife
 - Provides areas in the wildlife habitat area for access to water that is generated by rainfall

59th Avenue Wildlife Corridor and Amphitheater Area

1. Retain existing Parking Lot B – 20 paved parking spaces with option to add 20 parking spaces
 - Current parking lot is not utilized regularly, provides support parking to new trail connection
 - Identifies future parking location in the park
2. Continue portion of the H-5 Trail currently undesignated that leads from Parking Lot B to H-4 and H-1 Trails
 - Designates an undesignated trail that provide additional access to the H-4 and H-1 Trails
3. Add new trail located at Parking Lot B – connects to H-3 Trail
 - Relieves demand on the only trailhead entrance to H-3 Trail located at Parking Lot A
 - Encourages use of Parking Lot B that will alleviate parking demands on Parking Lot A
4. Add new trailhead at Parking Lot B
 - Provides park and trail information to trail users
5. Remove Parking Lot G – 12 paved parking lot spaces, restroom located at north end of the wildlife corridor
 - Removes park elements for the north end of the wildlife corridor and wash
6. Keep existing Parking Lots: C – 13 paved parking spaces, D – 10 paved parking spaces, E – 27 unpaved parking spaces
 - Maximize use of current parking spaces that survey west side of the 59th Avenue park area
 - Designate area in existing parking lots for two parking lot bus spaces
 - Add vegetation to buffer and reduce erosion between the parking lots and the wash area
7. Remove Parking Lot F – 26 paved parking spaces located at south end of wildlife corridor
 - Removes elements for the south end of the wildlife corridor and wash
8. Keep existing single use ramada that accommodates -two picnic tables. Add new restroom and drinking fountains adjacent to Parking Lot A. Option: Add single-use ramada with grill
 - Maximize existing park elements and provide support amenities to the heavily used H-3 Trail and Parking Lot A
9. Upgrade H-3 Trailhead and keep Parking Lot A – 19 paved spaces
 - Provides updated park and trail information to users
10. Upgrade existing connector trail to H-4 and H-1 Trails
 - Improve the surfacing of the trail connector which is heavily used
11. Add new trail connector from 59th Avenue to the ranger/park information station
 - Connects the park to bikeway and sidewalk at 59th Avenue
12. Add new ranger and park information station approximately 2,000 square feet to include ranger and park information office, maintenance storage, restrooms and drinking fountain. Add parking lot adjacent to station – 30 parking spaces and group shade area
 - The facility is centrally located in the park and addresses the following functions:
 - Enhances safety of park visitors by providing a centralized location for emergencies and information
 - Display and distribution of park information, rules and regulations
 - Access to restrooms and water
 - On-site storage of ranger and park maintenance equipment and supplies
 - Parking replaces spaces currently provided by Parking Lot F, which is proposed to be removed new trailhead for 59th Avenue trail connect at ranger/park information station
 - Provides park and trail information to park users
13. New trailhead that begins at the Ranger/Information Station
 - Provide access point to the trail connection to 59th Avenue sidewalk and bikeway
14. Remove existing equestrian hitching posts at south end of wildlife corridor

- Removes the posts out of the wildlife corridor and wash area
15. Add new trail node connection to H-1 and H-4 Trails
 - Identifies point of entry and provides directional signage for these trails
 16. Remove three restrooms from the wash
 - Removes building structures from the wildlife corridor and wash
 17. Add -one group ramada that accommodates 6- 10 picnic tables, grills, and restroom with drinking fountain
 - Provide ADA accessible shaded area, restrooms and water for groups and park users
 18. Option: Add two single use ramadas that accommodate two picnic tables per ramada with grills
 - Provides designated location for future shade and picnic structures
 19. Designate new trail node to existing trail H-4 and H-1 Trails on the northeast side of the amphitheater
 - Identifies point of entry and provides directional signage for these trails
 20. Remove seven ramadas, picnic tables and grills located in the wash
 - Removes structures from the wildlife corridor and wash area
 21. Add new trail node access at 59th Avenue from sidewalk and bike lane
 - Identifies point of entry for the park and directional signage for the trail
 22. Add new land bridge to cross 59th Avenue
 - Provides safe connection for park users between the east and west side of the park
 23. Upgrade two single-use ramadas adjacent to land bridge area
 - Improve and utilize two existing ramadas for resting and shade
 24. Restore amphitheater
 - Repair areas in the amphitheater, such as where tree roots have damaged seating
 25. Option: Add future parking north of amphitheater – 20 parking spaces
 - Identify designated area for future parking as needed
 26. Revegetate the wildlife corridor and wash areas, as well as identify other areas in the park that require revegetation
 - Reestablish native vegetation that encourages wildlife habitation and reduces erosion

67th Avenue Equestrian Trail Area

1. Keep parking lot entrance at 67th Avenue and Patrick Lane
 - This is a traffic signal-controlled and gated entrance
2. Existing Parking Lot K - includes 20 paved and unpaved spaces, equestrian trailer parking, and water trough. Extend corral area on south end of parking lot
 - Provide parking that is heavily utilized by park visitors and designates trail parking to the south of the current parking lot
3. Add new trailhead at H-1 Trail at equestrian corral area
 - Provide park and trail information to trail and equestrian users
4. Existing Parking lot J – includes 39 paved parking spaces. Add two linear bus parking spaces
 - Maximize current parking lot that is sporadically used, allow for parking space on the west side of the park
5. Improve park road from K to J Parking Lots to allow for two-way traffic
 - Current road only provides for single lane car access, provides safe entrance and exit of Parking Lot J

6. Keep and upgrade two existing single-use ramadas that accommodate two picnic tables per ramada at Parking Lot J. Add two single-use ramadas, and one group ramada that accommodates 6-10 picnic tables, include grills; add native vegetation to deteriorated areas of the park and add buffering between parking lot and the residential area north of the parking lot
 - Maximizes use of current picnic area and parking lot
 - Provides opportunity for shaded seating for group discussions and picnics
 - Restore native vegetation and provides buffer to ramada area and parking lot
7. Add new trailhead and trail connection to H-5A and H-5 Trails
 - Designate an undesignated trail to connect to H-5A and H-5 Trails
 - Provide new access to trails to relieve demand only designated trailhead at Parking Lot K
 - Provide trail connection to restroom with access to water from H-5A and H-5 trails
8. Upgrade or replace existing restrooms at Parking Lot J
 - Current restroom is inoperable
 - Provides access to water and restroom facilities at west side of park
9. Add new trailhead at Parking Lot H to existing trail H-5A
 - Provides park and trail information to heavily used trail
10. Existing parking area - includes 11 paved parking spaces
 - Provides parking to 3 single-use ramadas used for shade and picnicking
 - Location for trailhead access to H-5A and H-4A Trails
11. Remove existing restroom and add new restroom at Parking lot H
 - Current restroom is inoperable
 - Provides access to water and restrooms for ramadas and trail users
12. Upgrade three existing ramadas at Parking Lot H
 - Current ramadas are consistently utilized and require improvements due to deterioration
13. Add new trailhead at Parking Lot H going south to existing H-4A Trail
 - Provides park and trail information to heavily used trail
14. Existing undesignated trail to become designated trail connects H Parking Lot to H-5 Trail
 - Trail is currently undesignated and is consistently used
15. Swing gate relocated from west side of Parking Lot J to east side
 - This will allow parking access from the 67th Avenue side of the park and relieve parking demand on Parking Lot K, but still prevents “cut-through” traffic between 59th and 67th Avenues
 - Will allow for maximizing use of Parking Lot J which is sporadically utilized
16. New swing gate installed on east side of Parking Lot J
 - Prevents traffic from driving up to Parking Lot J
 - Allows for flexibility in utilizing the road east of Parking Lot J
17. Remove trails due to erosion issues
 - Identify as part of the trail evaluation that undesignated trails have caused erosion and should not continue to be used as undesignated trails
18. Upgrade trailhead connection at existing west entrance to H-5 Trail
 - Improve and update existing park and trail information at the entrance to the H-5 Trail
19. Revegetation of area with native vegetation around water reservoir area
 - Provide vegetation screening and restoration of vegetation to the area around the water reservoir area
20. Remove two undesignated trails due to erosion
 - Identify as part of the trail evaluation that undesignated trails have caused erosion and should not continue to be used as undesignated trails

21. Existing undesignated trail to become designated trail: connects H-1 Trail to Parking Lot B area
 - Identified as part of the trail evaluation that the undesignated trail is consistently used and should be identified as a designated trail
22. Existing undesignated trail to become designated trail: connects H-1 and H-4A Trails
 - Identified as part of the trail evaluation that the undesignated trail is consistently used and should be identified as a designated trail
23. Existing undesignated trail to become designated trail: connects H-1 and H-5A
 - Identified as part of the trail evaluation that the undesignated trail is consistently used and should be identified as a designated trail
24. Add accessible trail that connects to ramadas and restrooms at Parking Lot J
 - Provides ADA access for disabled individuals to shade, restrooms and water

Funding and Implementation

The projected cost to complete the improvements identified in the master plan is approximately \$5.5 million. Resources to fund the improvements include grants and operating and capital improvement funds. In addition, staff plans to also pursue alternative funding sources through community partnerships.

Funds currently available to begin to address the plan's recommendations total to approximately \$300,000. Those funds are proposed to be utilized for trail repairs and improvements, signage upgrades, trash can and picnic table repair and replacement and revegetation. In addition, a land bridge will be constructed over 59th Avenue that will connect the park's east and west sides and improvements to the gate park entrance will be completed as part of the road improvement project. Funding is planned in future fiscal years that will continue the completion of the master plan recommendations.

Staff recommends phasing the improvements to the park based on the following priorities: Continue repair and maintenance of trails; removal of invasive plant species and revegetation of the park with native plants; repair and upgrade existing park elements, remove park elements from the wash located at 59th Avenue that will allow for restoration of the wildlife corridor and vegetation; and installation of new park elements.

Summary

The recommendations for conceptual changes to preliminary master plan were presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission at its April 10, 2006 meeting. The Commission directed staff to continue to refine the proposed changes and present them at the two public meetings scheduled at Deer Valley High School on April 26 and 29, 2006. A total of 43 citizens attended the two public meetings. The general comments regarding the changes to the plan were positive.

Staff presented the Preliminary Master Plan Executive Summary to the Parks and Recreation Commission at its May 8, 2006 meeting. The Commission unanimously approved the proposed changes to the Preliminary Master Plan and directed staff to proceed with completion of the finalized master plan.

Based on the completed public process, park studies and analysis, the Parks and Recreation Commission accepted the revised preliminary master plan and directed staff to complete the plan and present it to City Council for consideration and approval.